

## Some Shortgrassers Could Sell Out And Keep Part Of Grandpa's Wagon

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MERTZON — I got a letter the other day asking if the Shortgrass Country actually was as bad as reported from here.

One writer hasn't a chance of answering such a far reaching question. To summarize the woes of this area would take a large wire service's staff. Even a hit-and-miss synopsis of our weekly troubles would consume the combined efforts of NBC and CBS. Why, if old Walt Cronkite or that Brinkley fellow had to get up a commentary every time we had a major disaster, they'd develop a case of laryngitis that would make the Mayo Clinic people wish they'd specialized in diaper rashes.

I can say that the overall battle of the land versus man has diminished. The human element is losing, but compared to depressions the ranch community has suffered since the treacherous Indians dumped the country into our laps, the present downtrend seems trifling.

Many of the ambitions of our citizens have been fulfilled. Progeny of the pioneers who moved out here in covered wagons have more than held together the family holdings. All of the early settler's descendants could cash out today under forced conditions for more than their great grandfathers had tied up in three wagons and teams. Given a fair break on the market, the liquidation could run even higher; in a few isolated cases, some sellers would probably have money enough left to march into an antique store and buy back one or two parts of the very wagons responsible for their heritage.

The success of later immigrants is harder to pinpoint. You can definitely say that those who came here in the late 30 or 40 years can be characterized as owning their saddles and having most of their household goods clear of paper. It is not uncommon to know a family that owns a pickup outright. Records at the courthouse cite many cases of clear titles on chicken houses and milk cows. I learned this during a recent tax reform movement. The local tax harvesters, modeling their plan after the federal government, are now in the process of requiring their subjects to render the sparrow nests in outbuilding, and the amount of foam produced at each milking. Neither of the two items has a lot of value, but the tax base has already taken in everything else.

As to borrowing power, the new-grounders don't have a spectacular line of credit. Nevertheless, within their ranks, hombres do exist who can walk into a banking house without having to lap the building several times to build up their courage.

Thus, by glossing over the rough spots, you can say that Shortgrassers have a good life. They have an abundance of fresh air to breath except when the nine-month dusty season hits, and plenty of potable water to drink if you don't count the scattered dry belts across the land. The altitude is perfect for boiling trash beans, and the climate molds the inhabitants' feature until they look right handsome in patched clothing.

Living so close to the action makes it hard to evaluate every happening accurately. Sports writers claim that old prize fighters become overly critical of their trade after too many blows to the head. Former bronc tuners, I know, have nothing complimentary to say about their erstwhile challenges. And I've heard that pilots who've flown much into the eyes of hurricanes do not support the Chambers of Commerce in the tempest zones.

Perhaps this has been true of my case. The man who wrote me may have been correct in questioning my position, but I'll tell him one thing for sure: most of the events that strikes us today aren't fit endings for sugar-mounted fairy tales.